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FLOOR DEBATE

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rural areas are experiencing losses of students, which then in turn provides losses in state aid. So they are looking at consolidating and unifying very seriously. And as Senator Coordsen indicated, these are communities, these are emotional issues, these are closing schools, not just closing down programs but schools that really affect the heart of these communities. I believe that we have come a long way. In 1920, just to refresh your memory, we actually had 7,264 districts in the state of Nebraska; we are now down to about 560 districts. And as was stated, almost clear across the state we have communities looking and evaluating their situations. And I think that it's important that we keep our word and that we continue to offer some incentives for these communities to work together in providing what is best for the students of Nebraska. With that, I ask for your support.

SENATOR CUDABACK: Thank you, Senator Stuhr. We are debating the advancement of LB 313. Senator Baker, followed by Senator Raikes. Senator Baker, you are recognized.

SENATOR BAKER: Thank you, Mr. President and members of the Legislature. I stand in support of this bill. I do have some questions about the fiscal note that will get answered off the floor. But I believe we've been appropriating \$2 million per year, I believe, and I don't quite understand how we get up to \$6.8 million because this bill, I think, proposes raising the base year to \$5 million, and that would of course establish a limit as to how many dollars we can obligate each year for new incentive program spending, because as you well know the first year is the most dollars you get, the second year is reduced, and I don't know what the percentage is, and then the third year is less yet. So, the base here establishes the maximum that you're going to be spending that year. I'm certainly in favor of this incentive fund because it does cover the cost of some new uniforms and things. It takes a little bit of the sting off of the initial shock of going together with schools. In our case, out in Hitchcock County, they completely changed the school colors and so on, and they had to actually repaint names on buses and things you'd...minor details, you might say, but they are expensive. And this did provide some incentive to go ahead and do this. This merger or the unification, in this